



# Asbestos capping work gets under way

By Cate Chapman

Preparations to cap a fifteen acre asbestos landfill in Iron Horse park are underway this week, as workers contracted by the Emergency Response Division of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) survey the area and its environs for exposed patches of the fiber, described by EPA officials as a "known carcinogen."

A sum of \$96,000, derived from the EPA's "Superfund," was designated last Tuesday to cap the eroding landfill, created and abandoned by the Johns Manville Corporation. The appropriation was announced publicly last Wednesday.

O & H Materials of Ohio has been contracted to search the 15,000 acre industrial park for other areas containing asbestos and to cap them, along with the fifteen acre landfill. Robert Ankstutis of the EPA is on-site coordinator for the project.

Ankstutis and other EPA officials met with members of the Superfund Action Committee Wednesday night to discuss the operation, along with representatives of the state Department of Environmental and Quality Engineering (DEQE) and the Boston and Maine Railroad (B & M Railroad), which is located in the industrial park. Also present were local officials and politicians.

Capping the landfill with gravel and seeded soil should take four months to complete, EPA officials said, and will constitute only the first phase of a park-wide clean up effort that could take four years.

Deputy Regional Administrator for EPA Paul Keough said at a press conference held in Iron Horse Park Friday that a remedial investigation and feasibility study costing \$770,000 is expected to begin this winter. It will take six to nine months to complete and will be followed by further clean-up activity.

The study will be completed by the end of the year and will take some time to complete.

Results from test samples taken throughout the park this spring have been analyzed. NUS Corporation, an environmental engineering firm contracted by the federal agency to perform the tests, has not yet prepared its report but, said Leighton, should do so within the month.

The remedial investigation and feasibility study will involve testing for chemical contamination in two brooks in the park, two lagoons used for septic disposal by B & M Railroad, a landfill formerly used by Reclamation Systems Incorporated, and a landfill near the General Latex Corporation.

[Leighton said that two other sites near the park previously included on the Superfund site list are now being pursued by the state DEQE: Dynamite-Nobel Corp. because "it is an active facility without hazardous waste disposal problems," and Shaffer landfill because the state agency is pursuing legal action against them under state solid waste landfill regulations.

"Superfund is designed to deal with orphaned or abandoned or bankrupt companies," he said.]

Investigation will also involve groundwater testing in and around the park.

Sharon Checareliah, chairwoman of SAC, said she was satisfied with EPA's decision to cap rather than to remove the asbestos from the park. She said removal would be "extremely dangerous" because the process could cause fibers of the asbestos to become airborne. People and other living animals could then inhale the substance.

Capping will require that all patches of asbestos in and around the landfill be covered with at least thirty inches of fill.

Ankstutis said Wednesday that 16 inches of gravel and 18 inches of soil will be placed over exposed or eroded patches of fill. The soil will be

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hold, thus preventing erosion (the existing landfill consists of merely "non-asbestos" material, which was not vegetated and has eroded.)

The new cap is expected to remain intact for fifty years.

Checrallah and other members of SAC expressed concern that the capping process, which is getting underway later than was originally expected, would not be completed in time for the heavy frost season.

Ankstitus said the thirty-inch cover would be enough to prevent the frost from heaving the asbestos up through the soil once the cold weather set in but that "the problem is getting the vegetation to take hold with the frost."

"We can't control Mother Nature," he said, "if the frosts come before we've finished putting the cover on or if we get two weeks of rain, then we'll have to monitor the site during the winter and put in the vegetation in the spring."

The capping process, due to begin after the survey is completed, will take 76 working days (the survey began last Thursday and is expected to take twenty days) to complete. It should be completed, said officials, around Thanksgiving.

Leighton said that negotiations with Johns Mansville Corp. had delayed operations somewhat. The negotiations, to arrange for the company to cap the site themselves, are required under the Superfund law.

"Mansville indicated they would like to do the job," said Leighton Wednesday, "but that bankruptcy prevents them. If Mansville wants to they still can, if they can show us a competent plan, a plan that would match ours."

Leighton, who said Johns Mansville has sought protection from liability under Chapter 11 (bankruptcy laws) for sometime now, said that if the company proposed appropriate plans, in the opinion of Ankstitus, they would be allowed to take over capping operations. He added the plans would not be considered appropriate if the extended the current deadline for capping by much more than a few weeks.

Keough said Friday that, under Superfund law, EPA was required to take "every possible legal action" to recover the costs of capping from the responsible party, but that to do so in Mansville's case would be "difficult because of the bankruptcy."

Throughout the capping procedure, said Ankstitus, workers will perform "swipe tests" of all kinds of surfaces in the park


area, including residences, where asbestos could lodge if it were were airborne. The procedure, he said, would help determine whether asbestos particles were emanating from any sources other than the landfill and if the capping procedure was raising more asbestos than it was settling. (The movement of earth, during the testing of old soil and the dumping of new, could dislodge unsuspected sources.)

Ankstitus said he would keep abutters to the park apprised of the procedure and work with schools to coordinate the traffic patterns of trucks carrying soil with school bus travel.

"I never thought you people would move that fast," said Chairman of the Board of Selectmen Thomas Conway, "but since the coalition has been intact, they got things moving, SAC, the town and state officials."

"I'm delighted we got the money," said Checrallah in a phone interview late last week. "I hope they get the job done before the bad weather sets in."

She added that "it's been the bureaucracy in the administration we've been fighting all these years. I trust Bob Ankstitus and the workers."



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**Above, Superfund Action Committee Chairwoman Sharon Checralla (left) and the EPA's project manager for Iron Horse Park Richard Leighton listen comments at last Wednesday's meeting. Below, the audience and examines the plan.**

**(Photos by Owen O'Rourke)**

